

# BILLY WHISKERS

By FRANCES MONTGOMERY

Billy lay down to get a good rest after his strenuous days at the front.

The next day turned out bright and fair, and after a good breakfast of sweet clover with the dew still on it Billy felt fine. He walked along and presently came to the top of a hill from which he looked down on a peaceful valley. Above it, perched on the very top of an almost perpendicular bluff, a castle with battlements and towers, whose walls were so built in the side of the bluff that it was hard to distinguish where the castle began and where it ended, being constructed at the same edge of stone as the cliff itself.

The castle had windows that commanded a view of the river, both up and down stream. And one could see from there a long stretch of valley and the river as it wound in and out through the green pastures and farms. Along the river bank ran a brown road that followed every curve of the stream like a giant snake trying to run a race with the waters of the river.

### Sees Animals

It was on one of the sunny slopes below the castle that Billy saw some sheep and goats.

"I'll go over and get acquainted with them, for it makes me homesick to think of Nannie, home and friends. I have not seen any of my own kind of animals for a long time. To look at this peaceful scene one would never think there was a cruel war going on anywhere in the world, let alone only a few miles from this very spot, and that it may come to this very pasture and lay it waste, as it has hundreds of others, turning green pastures into dirt heaps filled with holes that resemble burnt-out craters of volcanoes. I can't see any bridge crossing the river, but when I get there if there isn't one I can swim, as I did once before. For I expect this is the same river that I swam, only farther up, when I was escaping from the Germans." Billy ran down the hill so fast he sent up clouds of dust and loose stones went rolling down after him. Arriving at the river, he found, as he surmised, no bridge across it, so without a moment's hesitation he dived.

"Gee! This water is cold! Guess it is because I haven't had a bath for so long. It is a good thing I have to swim this river before showing myself to those clean, white sheep and goats, for my hair is as black as coal. I wonder where they are searching for me now. For they will never think I could get by the sentinels, and consequently will think I am hiding somewhere in camp. Let them look! Who cares? I don't!"

By the time Billy landed on the opposite bank of the river his hair was as clean and white as could be, and he looked his old proud self as he boldly walked up to where the sheep and goats were baaing a greeting.

"Baa!" said Billy. "Baa!" replied the leader of the flock, and Billy found he could understand the French goats quite as well as if they were American, the only difference being in the way they said "baa." The French used the long sound of "a," and the American the short sound of "a." Their leader proved to be a very old goat with crinkled horns, and as he came toward Billy he thought he had never seen such a fine specimen of a goat in his life. As for all the Nannies, they fell in love with him at first sight.

Billy had been with the goats and sheep several days when he thought he would like to know some of the history of the old castle that still seemed in such good repair.

"I'll ask the leader of the flock. He looks old enough to give its history back to the Ark."

Hunting him from the rest of the flock, Billy said:

"Grandfather—for that is what they all called him—don't you want to go down in the shade of that tree and tell me a little of the history of this castle and of those who used to live there?"

"Certainly I do. And I am the one who can tell you, if any one can, for I was born here, and my father before me, and his father, and away back to his grandfather. So you see I can tell you without a break all about the different families that have lived here."

"Well, instead of beginning at the beginning, suppose you tell me who lived here last."

"Until a short time ago the immensely wealthy Duke of Newville lived here. He was a collector of art treasures of all kinds, from a hundred and fifty thousand-dollar paintings to statuary beyond price. He also went in for Oriental rugs and tapestries. Not having anything else to do, he traveled extensively and amused himself by collecting these art treasures wherever he went. He and his beautiful daughter lived here alone with a retinue of servants. She was so beautiful and sweet that the people round about called her the Rose of Crag Castle, for that is the name of this castle, and her name is Rose."

"Sees Master" Billy exclaimed. "I see a hand beckoning to us from that barred window in the tower. Whoever it is there must be signaling to some one he sees. But I can't see any one. Can you?"

"No. But he is so high up that probably he can't."

"The two goats waited some time for some one to come in sight. But, no one coming, and the figure in the window still waving his hand, Billy said 'I'm going up closer and see whether the person imprisoned is a man or a woman.'"

Horrors! When he drew closer he recognized the prisoner as his own master!

"Billy! Billy! I have been trying to attract your attention for days. Now take this note straight to the General. Don't stop to sleep or eat until you deliver it, or my message will arrive too late!" Of course Billy, being a smart goat, could understand all his master's words. He knew that the note he saw fluttering to him from his master must be a message of the utmost importance, like the roll of paper he had carried to the General before. He had seen the post-hoe dogs carry messages like this between their teeth when there had been no time to hide them in their kits.

"Jumps Into River" Billy caught the note in his mouth as it fell and, without stopping to say good-by to his friend, the old goat, or to explain where he was going, he raced down the steep side of the cliff and plunged into the river.

From his window Billy's master could see him swimming and crouching for a long way after he came out on the opposite side he could see his white coat in among the bushes.

"Gosh! Billy! And I pray you may not be too late!" Saying these words, Captain Strongheart sank to the floor from exhaustion, for he was more than half starved and very cold. The Prince was trying to starve him into submission, and into telling how many troops were coming from America, where their big guns were placed, and all sorts of war secrets, but his only reply was "Rather death than betray my country!"

The last time they had tried to torture him to make him tell, but to no use. At last they had given up and had left, saying "Day after tomorrow you will be shot unless you tell!" But now, if Billy was not stopped he would be able to deliver the note to some one in his own army, and they would hasten away to rescue him.

On a wet hill, up hill and down dale, swimming streams and crossing fields. He went as the crows fly, for, knowing in which direction the camp was, he was sure he would save himself half the distance by going cross-country in a straight line.

"Makes Fast Time" It was surprising how soon he reached camp, and he rushed by the sentinel after sentinel, for, as he was going into camp instead of going out, not one of them tried to stop him. They were too glad to see him coming back after the severe reprimand the General had given them for allowing him to escape.

Straight to headquarters he went, where he banged on the door of the General's office. It was opened immediately, and in walked Billy. Opening his mouth, he laid the note on the desk before the General.

From Billy's appearance he knew he must have come a long way, or had had hard traveling, for he was wet and splashed with mud from head to foot.

He had carried the note all the way between his teeth, so it was nice and dry. But it was not written on paper or with a pencil, but on a torn end of a sheet, and the letters had been picked out with a pin. Captain Strongheart had had no pen, pencil or paper to write with, so he had torn a piece off the sheet on his bed and had picked out the letters in little dots with a pin he had found on the floor.

There were several officers in the room when Billy entered, and the General, after reading the note, reread it aloud to them. Then, addressing them, he said: "Meet me at the door in ten minutes with three of our fastest automobiles. And all of you come armed and prepared to capture these Germans."

"Billy, I forgive you for giving us the slip. You shall now have not only a gold collar, but one with a diamond star in it. Stay here and rest and we will bring your master back to you. We know just where to go, as he has told us in his note."

"Billy Sees Germans" "Hawkins, see that Billy is well fed and looked after."

Buckling on his belt, in which were two big pistols, the General grabbed his army cape and cap and hurried down the stairs, with Billy after him, though the General was so preoccupied that he did not notice he was being followed, and Hawkins did not try to stop Billy after the experience he had had trying to keep him in bounds once before.

On arriving at the foot of the stairs, Billy shot off down the street, going like mad. He was going back to his master and witness the fun of seeing the Germans captured and his master released. He knew he would have to go fast to get ahead of the swift autos, but he counted on them having to go away out of their way and nearly double the real distance to find a bridge to cross the river, while he would go across the country. Indeed, Billy stopped only once to take a drink and to eat a little clover. Then, feeling refreshed, he hurried on again. At last he reached the hill from which he had first seen the castle and had decided to go visit the sheep and goats.

"My! that was a lucky decision for my master that I made that day when I decided to visit some of my own kind," Billy now reflected.

Down the hill, across the river, and Billy was back. He was searching the window in the tower to see if he could not see his master standing there, when he heard voices and, looking to the right, he saw the German officers sitting at a small table, talking, drinking and smoking, on the lawn. [We hope they will not discover Billy.]

# SAM LEVY

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# SAM LEVY

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TORRANCE